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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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I gotta tell ya, this morning it was the coldest I've seen (felt!) in a lot of years!! Without the wind chill, it was below zero at 8:00. It's a balmy 3 degrees as I sit here working and enjoying my second cup of tea. On the plus side, we haven't had any significant snowfall yet; and there's barely any on the ground. I think I heard one of the local weather forecasters say that we've had just over an inch of snow this season - about a foot-and-a-half below normal for this time of the year! Granted, this is just in my area. There has been some snow in those areas to the north and west of us, although nothing substantial. And no golfing down on Cape Cod this winter - they have a couple of inches of the white stuff!

Okay, enough about the cold and snow!! Now I'm ready to get up on my old soapbox and do some ranting. It's been awhile! I don't know many of you personally, but I'm betting that some of you are a parent. Even more significant, you all were young once and had parents or guardians that tried to convey certain parental advice while you were growing up. And, during your early school years, I'm sure that some of your teachers also tried to impart some of their wisdom to reinforce many of the things that your parents were telling you.

C'mon, you know what I'm talking about. You've heard these tidbits of advice your entire life. Still no clue? How many times have you heard such statements as: Don't talk to strangers! Never take candy from a stranger! Don't open up the door to a stranger! Never get into a strange car! When home alone and the phone rings, never tell the person on the other end of the line that your parents aren't home! Don't pet strange dogs! Get the picture? Remember any of these? Have you said any of these to your own kids? Sure you do, and yes you have.

So where am I going with all of this valuable parental advice? It certainly applies today as much as yesteryear. In fact, it should apply even more so in today's world than yours or my youth. The internet age has produced a greater threat of anonymity. While you or I used to go to the local soda shop and meet people, nowadays, that soda shop can be an internet chat room. At least with my soda shop example, people had the ability to actually see who they were meeting and talking. On the web, everyone is faceless, for the most part. In a soda shop, it's going to be extremely difficult for a 50-year old sexual predator to pretend that he/she is a 14-year old who wants to be your friend! Can't say the same thing in a MySpace chat area, for example.

So, that's where I'm headed. If you read last week's issue (you read

every bit, right?!) you saw an article that talked about four families that are suing MySpace because their daughters were sexually attacked by people that they met in MySpace areas - people who pretended to be other than they really were. Tragic, yes. Preventable? Yes. Should MySpace be held liable? In my very humble opinion, no way. And I say that very emphatically. Yes, MySpace "provided" the opportunity. Their business provides an environment for people to "meet" online and "talk," But how do you make an environment in cyberspace "safe" for its users? MySpace isn't a "brick and mortar" establishment. Its customers/users do not interact in a physical environment. So what liability does a place like MySpace - or any other cyberspace chat/meeting area for that matter - have?

To use my soda shop analogy, the proprietor has certain legal responsibilities to uphold. There are fire and building codes that must be met to open such a business, and to keep it open. There are health codes that must be maintained to serve food. And, to go out on a limb, there are certain rules of common sense that such an owner should try to adhere to ensure the safety of his/her customers. These laws and codes exist to protect the customers. Adherence to these laws usually means that a patron doesn't have to be unusually concerned about his safety. However, that same patron still needs to maintain good behavior and make educated decisions while in that establishment. What do I mean by this? Say that I'm a customer who is an overweight diabetic with various food allergies. Self-responsible behavior dictates that I should not order six banana splits loaded with nuts sprinkled over the mounds of ice cream and whipped cream!! Now, if the soda jerk served that customer knowing that the customer had those health conditions, I see liability.

These factors don't apply to cyberspace, but I would agree that there should be some "common sense" responsibilities for these proprietors to adhere. Virus protection, sure. Phishing and spam prevention, yup, whenever possible. Highly visible warning notices against illegal activities online, advice regarding violence or predatory activity, and other similar potential safety issues should apply. Additionally, there should be counseling and other reporting areas made available, with staffing readily available for immediate attention. There should also be continuous monitoring of the chat areas in an effort to help maintain the safe and legal use by the users.

It all goes back to what I've been saying over the years in this column: common sense. I've talked about the nonsensical lawsuits by people who claim that video games cause violence. While different, there are a lot of similarities. It all boils down to people having common sense, and using it. It all comes down to parents teaching their kids not to talk to strangers. It means that parents need to monitor what their children are doing online - just as much as knowing who their friends are and where they are, in the non-cyberspace world. It's about teaching your children about the dangers of cyberspace and making sure that they truly understand. Parents, it's your responsibility to instill qualities of good judgment in your children. It's up to you to care for, and educate your kids; it's not MySpace's responsibility. And, if you fail to teach your children and make sure that they've learned by monitoring them; you certainly cannot hold places like MySpace responsible and sue them because they may have been the cyber version of that soda shop I mentioned.

When will people realize that they need to take responsibility for their own actions? When will people realize that if they choose to have children, it's their parental obligation to teach them right from wrong,

common sense versus the total lack of same? And when will people learn that it's not the responsibility of the rest of the world to pick up the slack when you yourself refuse to do it? And when will people learn not to promote frivolous laws to regulate their shortcomings?

And just so you don't think that I'm impugning just parents and their kids, I'm not. This is not just an issue affecting parents and children. Adults are just as "gullible" in cyberspace as kids. Look at the enormous personal losses people face via phishing scams. And it's not just the kids who participate in online chats - I bet all of you have, at one time or another, been in an online chat. Perhaps not in a site like MySpace, but perhaps on GEnie, Delphi, Compuserve, etc. back in the days... And adults make the same stupid decisions because of these online "relationships". Think I'm wrong? Then you're only fooling yourself. On a personal note (remember my words regarding a foul mood the past couple of issues?), I have a family member who chatted online with someone in another country, eventually traveled to that country, married the woman in that country, and eventually gained a visa for her to enter the US! Sure, it sounds like a romance out of Hollywood, but it's not. Just the opposite, I hate to say. I won't go into all of the details because of the personal nature (but I am writing a murder mystery based loosely on this ongoing saga!) of this story, but suffice to say that it involves financial stress on other family members, restraining orders, and several bouts of [relatively] short-term incarceration and probation! And to make matters worse - it that's remotely possible - that family member has not realized the common sense that he was born with and maintains that this marriage will work.

Yes, cyberspace was the environment for this farce to have been forged and grow, but it is by no means responsible for all that has transpired. Likewise, MySpace, and others, should not be held responsible for the fateful decisions and actions of its users. Should places like MySpace do everything within its powers to help maintain the safety of its users? I think that's already been decided. And, it sounds like MySpace is continuing to improve on those efforts. Will predators and their ilk find a way to circumvent those efforts? You bet. I still maintain that it's our responsibility as parents to teach our children right and wrong, and to be able to use common sense to these and other issues that they will encounter in their lifetime. Pay now, pay later. Neither has to occur ever if you make the time and take the effort to help your kids understand the consequences of their potential poor decisions.

I have other topics to discuss this week, of a more lighter note, but I'll get down off of my soapbox now, and offer those tidbits in a more appropriate area of the issue.

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, we've finally gotten some message traffic in the NewsGroup, and it feels kinda good.

I know, I know, I'll bet you're probably feeling pretty good about it too... more messages means less of my ranting, right?

Well, you're not getting off that easy. I'm going to rant some more about what's going on around us. Read it, don't read it, it's up to you. But if 'they'... you know who THEY are, right? It's 'them'.... if they come a' knockin' on your door in the middle of the night de-habeas your corpus, don't blame me, pilgrim. I've warned you.

It became public this week that, while testifying before Congress, our Attorney General, Alberto Gonzales, said that there is no guarantee of habeas corpus in the Constitution, only the circumstances under which it can be withheld or denied.

Habeas corpus, generally, in countries that don't think of the Geneva Conventions as simply "quaint", means that you have the legal right to have a hearing or other court proceeding to determine if your imprisonment or detention is lawful.

What's most troubling about this is not that it's a cornerstone of our legal system, it's that it's a cornerstone of almost everyone's legal system.

The other troubling thing is that, if we don't have habeas corpus protection because it's not expressly spelled out, then we don't have ANY of the protections that we've come to understand that the Constitution provides us with.

I'll say no more, as there could possibly be a Security Letter, Sneak 'n Peak search, or Warrant less Wiretap in progress even as I type this.

I guess I shouldn't worry though, huh? I mean, I'm hardly Public Enemy #1, right? It's not like I'm a Quaker or a school teacher or anything, right? Oh, sorry. You haven't heard about the school teacher yet. And because we don't have the protection of habeas corpus, you never will.

Well, let's get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

## From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Greg Goodwin asks for help with HD Driver and Daynaport:

"Hi all, I'm trying to get a Daynaport on the ethernet as detailed at...

http://www.anodynesoftware.com/ethernet/main.htm

Ok, how EXACTLY does this work?

I've tinkered with HD Driver 7.6 to 8.1 and only 8.1 even sees it out there on the SCSI bus. Mind you 8.1 is only a demo, and for only $35 I can upgrade to this edition. Not bad.

But what exactly would I accomplish if I did upgrade? There isn't anything that the demo can even hint of doing with the Daynaport.

Do you just format your system with HD Driver 8+... and then hope the STINg drivers they have on the Androdyne site will pick up the Daynaport from there?

Can STing handle PPP, PPPoe, or DHCP connections?

I know there are people on the ethernet using these Daynaports, so please chime in!"

David Wade tells Greg:

"You need a SCSI adaptor that does SCSI passthru. Link97 or 98 or TT or Falcon built in. You need to configure sting to load the Anodyne driver.

If you have the 0.71 drivers any version of HD Driver should be O.K.

Are you trying to boot from a floppy. If so, I have had trouble with this.

You should not need to format. Just install the driver. My drivers were partitioned with the Atari utilities. You then need to set up the sting stuff. I seem to recall some of the entries are case sensitive.
I also seem to recall some settings need to be set via the sting CPX.

Sting can do PPP over serial. Otherwise it only does plain ethernet with static IP address. Most home routers can cater for this.

Greg tells David:

"Thanks for all the help.  So far I have managed to get the system to load noticing that the Daynaport is out there at startup, and I am able to ping the router and it successfully sends the packets, though pinging doesn’t seem to work for any other locations.  Kinda at a stand still at the moment.

Part of me wonders why I can’t ping outside of the router.

Another part wonders if I have STing correctly configured for CAB.

Someday I’ll try Highwire when I feel ready to pony up for NVDI 4 and Speedo GDOS."

Guillaume Tello asks about surfing the net with a TT030:

"[Does] anyone knows how to connect a TT to a PC/Win98 and then to share the Internet connection I have on the PC? (PC and TT are located in the same room and I have a null-modem cable)."

David Wade tells Guillaume:

"Do you know I can’t remember if Win98 supports dial in networking. It certainly does not support connection sharing. You need something like Wingate.... If you have broadband get a router and ethernet for the TT. Either an EtherNec or a Falleron/Anodyne SCSI/Ethernet adaptor...."

Jerome Mathevet tells David:

"That is not true (Win98SE), see there:
http://www.annoyances.org/exec/show/ics_98

However, I seem to recall reading that Windows insists on having
192.168.0.1 as IP on the network to make Internet connection sharing
work."

'Coda' adds:

"If you can get broadband...

You could look for a Reibl or PAM VME ethernet card. I have a PAM card
in my TT and it works pretty well with MiNT (I ran my web/mail/ftp
server off it for quite a while).

A better option would be to wait for the NetUSBee cartridge which is
coming out soon (see http://hardware.atari.org). This is backwards
compatible with the EtherNec hardware and as such already has working
drivers for TOS and MiNT (I don't know about MagiC, as I don't have it
and so haven't tried it)."

Well folks, that's it for this week. I know it's short, but there
weren't as many message threads this week as I thought. I was hoping
that there would be several good, solid threads to carry things
through, but they turned out to be kind of sparse anyway.

Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen
to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - New Warcraft Sells Big On First Day!
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->From the Editor's Controller "Playing it like it is!"
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I'm pretty sure that during the weeks leading up to the holidays, I

mentioned my unsuccessful search for one of the two significantly rare new game consoles - the Nintendo Wii. Not only were these consoles (the other being the PlayStation 3) in limited numbers, but their costs were significantly higher than other consoles from the past, especially the PS2! So, in our wonderful capitalistic fashion of supply and demand, these consoles were seen online for exorbitant prices - and selling! Although my desire to obtain the Wii (for that promise of a rush playing a form of virtual golf!), there was no way I was going to pay these console-scalping prices. If I couldn't get one for the "normal" price I was willing to wait until they were more readily available. So, I would watch for the Sunday circulars and let "my fingers do the walking" whenever I saw stores advertising them. The usual response to my inquiring calls was "no, we don't have any in stock" and "no, I don't know when we'll be getting more in." Hanukkah/Christmas came and left, with no Wii. Over the next couple of weeks, I continued to make calls. No luck. Somewhere online I read (and likely reported in these pages) that supply of these machines might not occur until March. I started to believe that possible. But, I continued to watch out for the circulars. About a week ago, while researching articles for A-ONE, I came upon an article or piece from a blog that stated that more Wii consoles were going to appear in the upcoming Sunday circulars, I immediately went online to check the online circulars to see if I could find any type of confirmation of this rumor. Nothing. All searches at these store sites stated "out of stock" very blatantly. I called some of the various retail outlets to get confirmation. Again I was met with the same two comments mentioned above - no we don't and no I don't know when. Even late Saturday night, the eve before these ads were to appear, I checked out the online version of the circulars again. The circulars were conspicuously missing, promising to readily be available on Sunday. I mentioned this to my wife, who also thought this unusual. So, I decided that instead of reading my Sunday papers and checking ads late in the morning like I usually do, I'd check the ads early.

Sunday morning arrived, as did our two Sunday papers. My wife saw them first, and remarked that Circuit City had the Wii advertised - and not at the highly-inflated bundle price. EB Games/GameStop also had the machines advertised. I jokingly told my wife that I should go down and wait in line, in the bitter cold. I added that I wouldn't be surprised to learn that people were already waiting hours in the cold for the chance to get a machine. My wife suggested that I go, and take a chance. She told me that I didn't have to go too early. The worst that could happen would be that I'd come home empty-handed, and a little chilled! She even added that she'd go with me. I was starting to get a little optimistic.

We decided to try Circuit City because they are a larger store and more likely have a better supply, if any. We have four EB Games/GameStop outlets very close to us, but they're all extremely small stores. And two of those stores didn't open until an hour or more later than Circuit City. So, we planned to head out about a half hour before CC opened. When we got there, there was already a line outside the door where we parked; there was another entrance at the other end of the store! We sat in the car for a few minutes, and then got out in the cold and waited in line. We saw a small notice taped to the window that stated that they had 35 Wiis available. Looking at the small crowd in line ahead of us, and guessing the size of the line at the other entrance that was out of eyesight, we thought that we had a chance to get a machine. Ten minutes before the doors were to open, a few people started to leave, grumbling. We heard bits and pieces of people talking, including something about vouchers. One comment that we overheard was that some

people had received vouchers from previous sale ads, and were now holding them to obtain a machine that day. Another person told us that a clerk had come out a few hours earlier and handed out numbered vouchers. As the minutes ticked slowly on, a few more people got out of line and left. We kept thinking this a positive outcome for us, until five minutes to opening time. A clerk came out, took down the number available sign and replaced it with a "temporarily out of stock" notice!! Huh, how could they be out of stock before the doors opened? That led to credence of the voucher rumors. At that point, we decided to leave also. We then considered stopping at one of the EB Games/GameStop stores that we would pass on the way home. One was located in the mall, so we concluded that since that store was inside, lines would be long to avoid the cold. Another store would require a short drive, out of the way, and open at noon (it was now 10:00). We decided to try the outlet that was next on our way home, after the one at the mall.

We pulled into the small strip mall parking lot, and saw a few people already standing in line - maybe a half dozen people. This was a shorter line than was at Circuit City. We parked, got out, and stood in line. An hour to go before the store opened; and it was cold! One guy had been in line, complete with chair, blanket, and thermos since 5:30! We decided to bear the cold, taking turns in line while the other went back to the car and heat. Some people were looking through the window trying to see how many machines were available. Some counted anywhere from six to eight boxes, but couldn't tell whether or not some, or all, were display (and empty). Others tried calling the store via their cell phones to get availability info. The clerks inside wouldn't divulge that information! Nor would they let us in to wait, and get warm. The time passed very slowly. I must have gone back to the car to warm up about 3-4 times - it was that cold, and I wasn't dressed for a long wait! Cars pulled in, and left. People joined the line, and then left. There were around ten people in front of us, but a number of them were there as couples. We figured that if the store had about six or eight machines, we'd be in luck. We decided to stick it out and await our fate.

At about quarter-to, a clerk came out with a pad of "Post-It" notes. She started down the line, writing numbers down, and handing a number to each person in line (excluding those in line as a pair). Here we go again, the old "voucher" business! By number six, people were getting curious. One person in front of us asked what the significance of the numbered slips was. The clerk just smiled, and then added that "if you get a number, you get a Wii!" While we were waiting in line she wrote out 11 slips; we were number 8!! Behind us, we heard her tell someone that they had 21 machines. There were a dozen people in line, and the last two were in line thinking the store was giving something away. When they realizes that they were standing in line for nothing, they left. So, we were going to finally get the console - two months after it came out, and countless calls to stores. We don't know how many people had stood in line before us, and eventually left due to the cold. A few while we were there. And ironically, the guy immediately behind us had been out doing last minute errands for his son's birthday party. He hadn't dressed very warmly as he only figured he'd be out for a short time. He didn't even have any socks on! But, he happened to see the line, and decided to wait to see if he could get a Wii because his son wanted one for Christmas, but couldn't get one. He was thrilled that he'd be able to surprise his son and friends on his birthday!

So, the door opened, we got our machine and an extra set of controllers (they were also scarce!) and another game. I didn't want to set it up

right away because I knew if I did, I'd be hooked for the rest of the day. And, the Patriots were playing later that day - I wanted to see the game! My wife had no hesitation! After she completed her Sunday routine, she proceeded to start reading parts of the manual and set it up. Eventually I had to go downstairs to see what all the excitement was about! After a few games of bowling and a half dozen holes of Wii golf, I went back upstairs while I still had some resolve!! But I gotta tell you, the Wii Sports bundle that comes with the console is a blast!! I'm looking forward to this weekend when our big screen TV isn't tied by my wife, and I'm going to put more time in on the virtual links!

So, if you had anticipated getting a new Wii or PS3 for the holidays, and didn't have any success, don't despair. I've heard that PS3 consoles are out there and not flying off the shelves. Regarding the Wii, while they are more scarce, I can personally attest that they're obtainable without paying an arm and two legs to get one!! My wife got her PSP (to add to her PS1 and PS2) and now I have the Wii, to add to my Jaguar, Lynx, and 2600!

And, just to keep this somewhat Atari-related, if you've been enjoying playing games on your computer and game console since the ST days, you have probably played, and fondly remember Dungeon Master! I think that DM is my all-time favorite game on the ST, or any other machine that came after it - computer or console. I also think that DM was the precursor for that genre, which continues to evolve over time and with technology. Imagine what Dungeon Master could look and feel like today!! If you've played Diablo and its sequels, you may know what I mean. A friend of mine suggested Diablo to me a few years ago, and I was hooked. I picked up the entire set over time, and spent countless hours in front of them. Over time, I've searched for similar games, but was always disappointed with those that I thought I'd found. Well, that changed this past holiday. My wife doesn't usually buy me games because she has no idea what I like, or if the title she'd get would actually be similar to what she's seen me play. This year, she bought me three computer games> One was a variety of pinball games. She knows I'm a big pinball fan, and I have a number of computer pinball games. Score 1!! She also picked me up Bejeweled because I have it on my cell phone and enjoy it. Score 2! She also found Dungeon Siege: Legends of Aranna because she remembered me talking about Dungeon Master over the years. She figured "dungeon was in the title, so they all must be the same!" Well, her logic was flawed, but her choice was right on! Score 3! This particular CD actually has two games on it, but that's not readily known. The game is similar to Diablo, but better. If you like Dungeon Master, with the searching for clues, adding members to your party, hack and slash action, etc. - I'd recommend checking out Dungeon Siege. There is a new sequel out which I will search for, as well as older sequels, once I complete this one! Happy gaming!

Until next time...

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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# New Warcraft Expansion Sells 2.4 Million on First Day

According to game maker Blizzard Entertainment, the number of copies the new World of Warcraft expansion The Burning Crusade sold in its first day was 2.4 million.

World of Warcraft - WoW as it's known to gamers - is a massively multiplayer online role playing game (MMORPG) in which players fight monsters, go on quests, and even duel one another in a complex virtual world peopled by millions of users across the globe.

WoW was already the world's largest online role playing game even before the record-setting success of The Burning Crusade, according to Irvine, California-based Blizzard. The firm claims more than eight million players globally, with two million in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico alone.

"The Burning Crusade has already exceeded even our most ambitious expectations," said Mike Morhaime, Blizzard's president and cofounder, in a published statement. "We're pleased that so many players are eager to see all of the new content that the expansion has to offer, and we look forward to seeing everyone online as additional players continue to upgrade in the days ahead."

According to Blizzard, The Burning Crusade had game addicts forming midnight lines at retailers as far away as Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and New Zealand - an image reminiscent of the holiday rush to find Nintendo's Wii and Sony's PlayStation 3.

Business has been so brisk that Blizzard has advised would-be buyers to call their local stores in advance to ensure they still have copies available.

But a shortage might do little to discourage Burning Crusaders, because online gamers have never been known for restraint, at times spending days in front of their screens.

When users do log off, the game's highly evolved online world, in which players assume the roles of fictional characters, not only persists but evolves. The result? Users never have to play the same game twice. They explore a world that morphs itself into new versions daily.

WoW belongs to the fantasy genre of MMORPGs, a blend of old-school Dungeons & Dragons plots with high-end graphics and online wizardry reminiscent of today's Lord of the Rings, complete with a soundtrack that would do George Lucas and John Williams proud.

The Burning Crusade pits users in an apocalyptic battle of good versus evil - "heroes will rise, legends will fall" reads a line on the game's movie-like trailer - where they can fight, die, bleed, and court glory, yet never leave the confines of the living room couch.

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The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

## ’Castro Is Dead’ Spam Email Infects Computers

A spam e-mail with messages including "Fidel Castro dead" and "Saddam Hussein safe and sound" contains a virus which has infected thousands of computers, Spain’s Association of Internauts has said.

With speculation rife about the Cuban leader’s health, the association said that a computer would be infected by the virus if the recipient opened the message.

"The virus is affecting thousands of computers," the association said Monday. Other messages sent with the virus include Venezuelan President "Hugo Chavez dead", "President of Russia Putin dead," and "US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has kicked German Chancellor Angela Merkel."

Another read: "The (US) Supreme Court has been attacked by terrorists."

## MySpace Sues Colorado Man For Alleged Spam

The popular online hangout MySpace.com has sued a Colorado man once accused of being one of the world’s top three spammers, saying the man gained access to MySpace profiles using stolen passwords and used the information to send spam bulletins.

MySpace, which is owned by News Corp., claims Scott Richter and his various companies, including OptInRealBig.com and Mediabreakway.com, sent millions of junk messages to members using technology that made the messages appear to come from individual members’ accounts.

The lawsuit was filed Friday in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles and asks for damages, an injunction preventing Richter and his companies from accessing MySpace, and repayment of all profits gained as a result of the activity.

Several calls to Richter were not returned Monday.

Managing its rapid growth has been a challenge for MySpace, which has fallen prey to people who launch spam attacks.

Unlike random unsolicited e-mails, which are readily identified as junk, the spam bulletins on MySpace appear to be sent by trusted friends, giving them an air of legitimacy.

Spammers are able to send the fake messages by planting viruses that post spoof login pages, asking users to re-enter their username and password. The spam program then logs into the account and send the unwanted ad messages to a person’s friend list, which in some cases can number in the tens of thousands.

The lawsuit claims Richter either spoofed login pages to steal usernames and passwords in a "phishing" scam or acquired a list of names and

passwords from a third party.

The messages include come-ons offering free ringtones, Lacoste polo shirts or other items, the lawsuit alleges.

MySpace has gotten more aggressive in fighting spammers. In recent months, the company hired Hemanshu Nigam, a former federal prosecutor, to head its security efforts and is rapidly expanding its team of software engineers, lawyers and other experts who look for suspicious activity, educate users on how to prevent attacks and go after the worst offenders.

"We're committed to protecting our community from phishing and spam," Nigam said. "If it takes filing a federal suit to stop someone who violates the law and damages our members' experience, then that's what we'll do."

In 2005, Richter agreed to pay $7 million in a settlement with Microsoft Corp. over spam messages. He also settled a similar lawsuit with then-New York state Attorney General Eliot Spitzer alleging Richter made millions of dollars from unsolicited e-mails.

## U.S. Still World's Spam Leader

According to a new report from security firm Sophos, the United States still retains its title as king of the spam scene, but China is now sharing in the shame as the nation that generated the most malicious code in 2006.

Sophos' annual Security Threat Report revealed that U.S.-based computers relayed 22 percent of the world's spam last year, followed by China at 15.9 percent and South Korea at 7.4 percent. What's more, 90 percent of all spam is now relayed from zombie computers, machines hijacked by Trojan horses that are under the control of malicious hackers.

Security researchers are warning I.T. professionals to ramp up for more targeted attacks in 2007. "The U.S. market is undeniably a target for online criminal activity," Ron O'Brien, senior security analyst for Sophos, said in a statement.

"More and more, organizations with U.S.-based Web sites are falling victim to targeted attacks."

Although Sophos said the U.S. has made progress in its efforts to reduce spam-relaying, the security firm pointed out that new spam techniques are making it more difficult to block the unsolicited e-mail. Specifically, image-based spam - spam that conveys its message through an embedded graphic - is on the rise.

According to data from IronPort Systems, image spam accounted for 25 percent of total spam volume in October 2006 compared to 2.8 percent in October 2005, an increase of 421 percent.

"Overall, spam catch rates are declining because signature-based antispam solutions can't keep up with the advanced techniques spammers are using," said Craig Sprosts, a senior product manager at IronPort. "This can cause your e-mails to get delayed 24 hours or more because it puts a strain on the infrastructure."

While spam might be annoying, it also can be downright dangerous. Sophos detected 41,536 new pieces of e-mail-borne malware in 2006 and reported an increase in the number of phishing attacks that try to trick recipients into divulging sensitive information, such as passwords or credit card numbers.

The most prolific e-mail threats of 2006 were the Mytob, Netsky, Sober, and Zafi families of worms, which together accounted for more than 75 percent of all infected e-mail, Sophos said.

However, the firm predicted that 2007 is likely to see a significant shift away from the use of e-mail-based security threats, with Internet criminals instead looking to exploit new Web 2.0 capabilities.

"Cyber criminals are seeking new ways to distribute malware and the Web seems to be the logical environment as mounting applications and social sites keep end users active on the Internet," O'Brien noted, citing streaming media and file-sharing services as additional avenues for attack.

## Botnet Hunters in Closed-Doors Redmond Summit

Faced with arguably its biggest security crisis since the 2003 network worm attacks, Microsoft is throwing its support behind a high-level powwow to discuss the escalating threat from zombie botnets and zero-day malware attacks.

The software maker is rolling out the red carpet for the world's top security research professionals attending a closed-doors workshop at its Redmond, Wash., headquarters on Jan. 25 and 26.

The summit is being called to brainstorm the growing sophistication of botmaster operational tactics and the use of vulnerabilities and zero-day exploits in the wild.

The invite-only attendees, drawn from the biggest names in the anti-virus and Internet security space, will spend the two days talking about the advancements in spyware and phishing gangs that use botnets for online crime.

A botnet is a collection of broadband-enabled PCs, hijacked during virus and worm attacks and seeded with software that connects back to a server to receive communications from a remote attacker. In 2005 and 2006, the botnet threat exploded on the Windows platform as users struggled to deal with clever social engineering attacks.

According to statistics from Symantec, in Cupertino, Calif., an average of 57,000 active bots (individual compromised machines) was observed per day over the first six months of 2006. The botnets, which are easy to create and maintain, serve as the key hub for well-organized crime rings around the globe, using stolen bandwidth to make money from spam, spyware installations and identity theft attacks.

Microsoft has acknowledged that bots and Trojans present the biggest threat to Windows users and, with the recent surge in zero-day attacks targeting unpatched flaws in its software, the company's interest in the

topic could not have come at a better time.

On the opening day of the summit, two Microsoft representatives will actively participate in the discussion around zero-day malware attacks. Greg Galford, a security architect in Redmond's Security Technology Unit, will present a case study on the way the MSRC (Microsoft Security Response Center) responds to zero-day exploits while Ziv Mador, a member of Microsoft's anti-malware team, will share details on zero-day exploits in 2006.

Galford will also appear on a panel discussion on how to plan for Internet-wide zero-day threats, while MSRC manager Mike Reavey is also listed as a speaker.

Also on tap to present is Jerry Dixon, manager of the U.S. government's CERT (Computer Emergency Response Team), who will talk about the changing nature of cyber attacks. Alex Shipp, anti-virus technologist at MessageLabs, will provide a bird's-eye view of targeted Trojan attacks, and Jose Nazario, senior software engineer at Arbor Networks, will discuss the link between massive botnets and DDoS (distributed denial-of-service) attacks.

## Tighter Controls On .eu Domain Names

Under a new rule that will come into force next month, European registrars for the ".eu" domain will be able to immediately stop the transfer of ownership of a domain name if it's suspected of abuse.

The rule, set to take effect February 19, will make it easier for investigations into activities such as spam, although the Web site can still function, said Patrik Lindn, communications manager for the European Registry of Internet Domain Names (Eurid).

Eurid is a nonprofit organization based in Diegem, Belgium, that oversees administration of the.eu domain, which started accepting registrations in December 2005. So far, about 2.4 million Web sites now carry the.eu top-level domain suffix.

Under current rules, registrars had to give domain owners 14 days notice before putting a hold on ownership transfers, Lindn said. But those who were using Web sites for nefarious activities could continually transfer ownership, making it more difficult to take action, he added.

Eurid, which has been running for about a year, is also circulating a draft of a code of conduct for its registrars. The code lays out a series of best practices that weren't appropriate to include in the legal agreement Eurid already has with domain registrars, Lindn said.

Eurid has had trouble with registrars before. In July 2006, Eurid suspended 74,000.eu Web addresses and sued 400 registrars after it suspected domain names were being registered with the intent to sell them, which is forbidden. Later, Eurid said it appeared all of the suspended domain names and registrars were linked to just three U.K.-based companies.

Eurid is accepting comments through February 19 from registrars on a draft version of the code, Lindn said. The code will be finalized next

month and will be voluntary for registrars.

After electing a new executive board of registrars, the code should be put into practice by the end of March, Lindn said.

Registrars that adopt the code will be entitled to place a ".eu Code of Conduct" logo on their Web site to alert users, indicating the registrar meets the code's service standards.

## Internet Chucks ".um" For U.S. Isles

The list of Internet domain names just got shorter.

The Internet's key oversight agency decided recently to yank ".um" - for U.S. "minor outlying islands."

No one was using it anyhow, and the organization that has run ".um" - the University of Southern California's Information Sciences Institute - no longer wanted to bother.

So the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers decided unanimously last week to eliminate it entirely, bringing the list of domains to 264. There are still separate domains for larger U.S. territories, including ".gu" for Guam and ".vi" for the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The Internet has seen new domain names such as ".eu" for Europe and ".travel" for the travel industry in recent years, and ICANN is reviewing a proposal to create an online red-light district under ".xxx."

Last month, it began accepting public comments on how best to pare the list by revoking outdated suffixes, primarily assigned to countries that no longer exist. The Soviet Union's ".su" is the leading candidate for deletion; that'll be harder to strike than ".um" - a Google search produced more than 3 million ".su" sites.

The decision to eliminate ".um" is independent of last month's efforts and was driven by ISI's desire to get rid of it. The USC institute ended up with control of ".um" in 1997 simply because its staff was in charge of the Domain Name System. That role went to ICANN with its creation in 1998 but ".um" stayed with ISI.

## Unpaid Fee Closes State Debt Groups' Web Site

An association of debt management offices, who together manage billions of dollars of government debt, has had its Web site closed after it failed to pay the $35-a-year fee to keep the Web address registered.

The World Association of Debt Management Offices (Wadmo), a forum for treasury officials from more than 40 developing countries, ran the wadmo.net Web site, but the domain name expired on January 15.

Cecilia Mendoza, of the Wadmo secretariat in the Philippines Treasury, said Wadmo planned to renew the address but had been held up because it

was cutting ties with the UN’s UNCTAD agency, and transferring the body’s duties to different officials.

"It’s because we couldn’t even withdraw money, because the (new) signatories are not yet authorized," Mendoza told Reuters by telephone from Manila.

Domain Bank, the domain name registrar, charges just $35 a year to register a ".net" internet address, or $250 a decade.

Wadmo’s members span Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and South America, and include state debt management offices in Russia, Nigeria, Indonesia, and Romania, according to a cached version of Wadmo’s Web site.

## Users Bash New Google Groups

Google Groups, Google’s online discussion service, today lost its "beta" label and graduated to the ranks of officially sanctioned software. A few vocal users aren’t pleased.

In a Google blog post marking the occasion, software engineer Griff Hazen said, "Now you can customize the look of your group, create and edit web pages, upload and share files (including photos), and view member profiles. And for your discussions, there’s no need to struggle to follow interrupted conversations, as Google Groups now includes the same style of organization that Gmail users love."

Google Groups users, however, detest the changes, at least those who have gone to the effort of posting. While there’s probably a silent majority that ranges from neutral to enthusiastic about the new interface and features, the users posting their opinions online have few nice things to say.

A person posting as "Matty F" wrote, "This new version of Google Groups is almost completely unusable. Can we have the old one back please?" Such sentiment reflects a common theme among the disgruntled users.

Another poster identifying himself as "Rich Jordan" wrote, "I’ll have to add my dismay over this change. The new interface is ugly and slow compared to the previous one, and much, much less intuitive."

"The new interface is really awful," a person with the user name Gabriele complained.

There are dozens of such posts, quite a few of which aren’t printable.

The Google Groups discussion of "The New Google Groups," now seventy-four posts in length, includes an acknowledgment of the predominantly negative tone of the comments from a Google Groups Guide. "I’m sorry to see the disappointment in this thread," the post reads in part. "...Please do know that the members of the team and I are closely reading along as you’re posting and your feedback is extremely important to us."

The new Google Groups includes a new interface with navigation links on the right-hand side and the ability to change colors, add icons, and generally move things around to customize the appearance of a Group. It

also allows group members to create, edit, and discuss pages, to upload and download files through the Groups interface, to display a list of group members for others in the group.

And if there's any merit to the complaints being posted by users, further features and changes are almost certainly forthcoming.

## MySpace To Distribute Amber Alerts

The social-networking Web site MySpace.com will now distribute Amber alerts to members notifying them of missing children in their communities.

MySpace, a News Corp. unit, is teaming with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children to distribute the alerts, which are triggered by law-enforcement officials.

The online alerts, which will begin Tuesday, will be sent to all users in the ZIP codes where it was issued. They will appear in a small text box at the top of a user's portfolio. The user can click on the box for more information, including a photo of the missing child and a description of the suspect.

The alerts were named for Amber Hagerman, a 9-year-old girl killed in Texas in 1996.

MySpace also announced two safety features designed to protect members' privacy.

The site will now require people signing up for an account to provide a working e-mail address and verify their identity by responding to an e-mail sent to the listed address. This is a practice common with other online services, but MySpace has been hesitant thus far because of fears the confirmation messages might end up mistakenly in spam filters.

The site, open only to those 14 and over, will also offer a tool to prevent any member under age 18 from being contacted by adults, and vice versa. The tool, however, is optional and relies on self-reported ages.

MySpace recently said it was developing software that will allow parents to learn of their child's use of MySpace and be notified of usernames, ages and locations they use in their personal profile pages.

## Major Linux Groups Band Together

Sometimes two heads are better than one. Sometimes they're not. On Monday, the Open Source Development Labs (OSDL) and the Free Standards Group (FSG), two of the best-known names in the open-source world, announced plans to merge, forming The Linux Foundation.

Jim Zemlin, the FSG's former executive director, will lead the Foundation. In addition to Zemlin's support, the Foundation has the backing of HP, IBM, Intel, and Novell, among others. Like its precursors, it will promote the adoption of Linux, the open-source platform that continues to make strides against Windows and Unix.

"Linux offers freedom of choice, customization, and flexibility without forcing customers into vendor lock-in," said Zemlin in a published statement. "The Linux Foundation helps in the next stage of Linux growth by organizing the diverse companies and constituencies of the Linux ecosystem to promote, protect and standardize Linux."

The Linux Foundation also will seek to protect the intellectual property rights of Linux developers and make sense of the many flavors of Linux - Ubuntu, SuSE, Fedora, Xandros, Debian, and Mandrake, among many others - that pepper the market now.

And it intends to protect the independence of Linus Torvalds, the programmer after which Linux is named. Torvalds built the first Linux kernel and has the final say over how the kernel is modified, choosing among proposed enhancements and granting them his imprimatur.

According to Michael Goulde, Forrester senior analyst and expert on open source, the low-key, press-shy Torvalds is seen by the Linux world as a benevolent dictator. "The work that he does is so critically important," said Goulde, noting that many open-source projects are led by such figures.

"They may or may not have conventional charisma," said Goulde, "but they have a lot of respect in the community because of the work that they've done, and at the end of the day, the core of Linux is decided by Linus Torvalds."

Indeed, the open-source world - in which software's code can be seen and modified by anyone who wants to improve it, following certain restrictions - is sometimes seen as an mix of popular ideals on the one hand and benevolent dictators on the other.

"People can contribute in any way that they're able, from commenting on the quality of the code to making contributions to enhancements," said Goulde. "The potential for participation is much broader than in traditional development models."

As a result, open-source development often proceeds more quickly. Goulde noted that Microsoft taking five years to develop Windows Vista would be unheard of in the open-source world, where there are fewer "big bangs" and more incremental adjustments for products that closely fit market needs.

Above all, said Goulde, open source is also a meritocracy in which programmers' skills can take them - and their concepts and code - as far as they're worth. "It's not so much who you are, but what you've done - your skills, your knowledge, your capability," said Goulde.

## OpenOffice, Office 2007 Ready To Rumble on Rival Document Formats

On Tuesday, rivals Microsoft and OpenOffice.org both released toolkits that support building applications for their competing document file formats and productivity suites.

OpenOffice's toolkit allows developers to add the ability to save documents in Open Document Format for Office Applications (ODF) to a variety of applications.

Meanwhile, Microsoft’s kits help companies build applications for its Office 2007 productivity suite, which is based on Open XML, ODF’s rival file format. Office 2007 is available to business customers and will be in wide consumer release on Jan. 30.

The OpenOffice ODF Toolkit Project has published an initial version of its toolkit online and is inviting members of the community to add to its development, said Louis Suarez-Potts, community manager for OpenOffice.

Previously, developers would have to add "a good piece of OpenOffice" code to an application to give it the ability to save documents in ODF, Suarez-Potts said.

The creation of the ODF Toolkit makes this easier, he said.

For example, "if someone has a mail application, they can take the tools we’re making available and make it so mail messages can be saved as ODF," Suarez-Potts said.

However, e-mail is just one of many applications for which the toolkit can create the option to save files as ODF, he said. Because ODF is "a flexible file format," any application for which someone creates content can include the option to save files in this way, Suarez-Potts said.

More information about the toolkit can be found on the ODF Toolkit site at OpenOffice.org and on this Sun blog.

Microsoft’s toolkits for Windows SharePoint Services 3.0, Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007, and the Microsoft Office Project 2007 provide technical guidance and sample code so developers can build what Microsoft is calling Office Business Applications. The company hopes these applications will allow employees to access information from back-end systems through the new Office UI, which it has named Microsoft Office Fluent. On Tuesday, Microsoft announced the name of the Office 2007 UI for the first time and said it will license Fluent royalty-free so developers can build new applications that look like those in the suite.

In addition to the toolkits, Microsoft also announced that it will have a new portal on Microsoft Developer Network (MSDN) to focus on development around Groove, a P-to-P (peer-to-peer) application it acquired when it bought Groove Networks.

P-to-P has become a strategic part of Microsoft’s collaboration software strategy, and the company has even made Ray Ozzie, Groove’s founder and brainchild, its chief architect and heir apparent to Microsoft founder and Chairman Bill Gates.

Microsoft will launch the Groove portal on MSDN this calendar quarter along with free templates, called Application Templates for Groove 2007, that will provide sample code for a variety of user scenarios for using Groove within the Office suite.

More information about Microsoft’s announcements can be found on its Web site.

The ISO recently approved ODF as an international standard for document file formats. It is supported by companies such as IBM and Sun, which markets its own version of OpenOffice called StarOffice. Microsoft’s Open

XML, on the other hand, recently won approval by Ecma International as a standard, but the ISO has not approved it yet.

## Microsoft Pays For Wikipedia Edits

A software engineer in Australia has said he was offered payment by Microsoft to edit certain entries in the Wikipedia online dictionary, opening a heated debate about the ethics of such a move.

Rick Jelliffe, chief technology officer of XML tools company Topologi Pty. Ltd., said he will probably accept a contract from Microsoft to edit Wikipedia entries on ODF (OpenDocument Format) and OOXML (Microsoft Office Open XML), competing document format standards.

In blog posting on the O'Reilly Web site, Jelliffe said he recently received an e-mail from Microsoft saying they wanted to contract someone "independent but friendly" for a couple of days to provide "more balance" on Wikipedia concerning the ODF and OOXML formats. He said he rarely uses Microsoft products and does not imagine he is viewed as a Microsoft enthusiast.

Jelliffe, who lives in Sydney, wrote "The XML & SGML Cookbook" and describes himself as a standards enthusiast. He says he has added material to Wikipedia entries in the past, and that he doesn't consider himself as being hired to add pro-Microsoft information, just to correct errors.

His disclosure unleashed a heated debate about the ethics of a company paying someone to edit Wikipedia entries, and the effect such payment has on the credibility of the site. "From now on we should take the Wikipedia entry on OpenDocument with a grain of salt," wrote Daniel Carrera, an ODF developer, in an e-mail.

Other comments on Jelliffe's blog posting weren't so kind. "Since you openly admit being paid by Microsoft you immediately destroy any credibility as a neutral commentator. End of story," one person wrote.

The matter is particularly sensitive given the Wikipedia entries in question. Microsoft created OOXML to compete with ODF, an electronic document format backed by Sun Microsystems, IBM, and open-source companies. ODF appeals to users interested in open-standard document formats that will ensure they can continue to access their existing files and to lessen their dependence on Microsoft.

While the formats are competitive, some companies, such as Corel Corp. and Novell Inc., have said they'll support both.

It's not yet clear what would happen if Jelliffe does make changes to the pages.

Wikipedia "tends not to look favorably in terms of conflict of interest and paying someone is a conflict," said David Gerard, a volunteer spokesman for Wikipedia.

Jelliffe could potentially be blocked from contributing to the site. The English language site is administered by about 1,000 volunteers who have the authority to block editors from contributing to the site, Gerard said. Publicity people who update the Wikipedia page about companies they

represent routinely get blocked from the site, he said.

However, given the attention brought to this particular incident, Gerard finds it likely that readers will closely watch for changes made by Jelliffe and respond with their own updates and changes, resulting in an overall improvement to the relevant pages.

Gerard said the situation is regrettable though. "We're disappointed that Microsoft thought it had to work by stealth like this," he said. The company would be better off donating the money to Wikipedia and earning the goodwill that would result, he said.

A representative from Microsoft's external press office in the U.K. couldn't confirm that Microsoft had made the offer to Jelliffe.

## Idea Of Paid Entries Roils Wikipedia

When a blogger revealed this week that Microsoft Corp. wanted to pay him to fix purported inaccuracies in technical articles on Wikipedia, the software company endured online slams and a rebuke from the Web encyclopedia's founder for behaving unethically.

The imbroglio will soon pass, but it raises a bigger question: Why is it so bad to pay someone to write something on Wikipedia?

The "free encyclopedia that anyone can edit" requires articles to have a "neutral point of view." But most contributors surely have some personal motivation to dive into a subject, whether it's adoration of "Star Trek" or a soft spot for geraniums.

What's to say contributors who get paid have a harder time sticking to the golden path of neutrality? And doesn't Wikipedia have a built-in defense mechanism, the swarms of volunteer editors and moderators who can quickly obliterate public-relations fluff, vanity pages and other junk?

That is precisely what ran through Gregory Kohs' mind last year when he launched MyWikiBiz, a service that offered to write Wikipedia entries for businesses for $49 to $99.

A market researcher in West Chester, Pa., Kohs believed that the corporate world was underrepresented in the sprawling Web encyclopedia, which is dense with obscure topics.

"It is strange that a minor Pokemon character will get a 1,200-word article, but a Fortune 500 company will get ... maybe 100 words," he said.

Kohs, 38, said he was committed to having MyWikiBiz create only legitimate Wikipedia entries, neutral, footnoted and just on companies or organizations with a sizable presence.

"I was not going to write an article for Joe's pizza shop at the corner of Main and Elm," he said. After all, Kohs was fine with Wikipedians editing his clients' entries however they saw fit, but he didn't want the articles to be taken down entirely for being irrelevant.

Kohs researched Wikipedia to see if his idea violated the site's communal spirit. He found what appeared to be an answer in his favor: Wikipedia's

Reward Board.

The board is Wikipedia’s internal forum for people who would like to see certain topics introduced or improved so they have a chance of achieving the rare status of "featured article," earned when editors consider an entry supremely well-written and fair.

Here’s what got Kohs’ attention: Offers for barter or even cash are common on the forum, and the person making the offer can remain anonymous. Indeed, on Wednesday, someone was ponying up $55 for whoever could get an article about Lithuania to reach featured status.

So Kohs and his sister decided to launch MyWikiBiz. But a few days after they put out a press release in August, MyWikiBiz’s account on Wikipedia was blocked.

Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales called Kohs to tell him MyWikiBiz was "antithetical" to Wikipedia’s mission, as Kohs recalls the conversation. Kohs noted that he was openly identifying himself as the author of his clients’ pages. And he cited the Reward Board.

Wales was unswayed. But he told Kohs he could create Wikipedia-like entries for his clients on MyWikiBiz.com. Then Kohs could reach out to Wikipedia editors and see if they’d like to "scrape" the pages - use them as Wikipedia entries.

Kohs says he got about 10 clients into Wikipedia this way over the next few weeks. (He won’t name the clients because he wants their entries to stick.) Around that time, however, Wikipedia’s volunteer crews were tweaking the site’s conflict-of-interest policy. As Kohs read one new rule, he could post his clients’ copy on his own personal user page inside Wikipedia, rather than on MyWikiBiz.com. Presumably that would make it easier to attract Wikipedia editors’ interest.

Wales had earlier told Kohs that step would be forbidden. So Kohs wrote Wales that it appeared the community now disagreed with him. Wales shot Kohs down in a terse e-mail.

"Absolutely unacceptable, sorry," Wales wrote.

Ultimately, Kohs was permanently shut out of Wikipedia. Instead he launched Centiare.com, a Wikipedia-esque directory for businesses.

"I think I was rubbing him the wrong way," Kohs says now. "I probably should have just kept my mouth shut."

Wales agreed in an interview that companies and regular people likely are surreptitiously editing their own entries, doing in secret what MyWikiBiz was open about. But that doesn’t mean the site should give up trying to prevent public-relations efforts, Wales said.

"It’s one thing to acknowledge there’s always going to be a little of this, but another to say, ‘Bring it on,’" he said.

Wales was asked why it mattered if Microsoft or anyone else paid to have copy written on Wikipedia, since there’s no guarantee that the site’s vigorous editors and moderators would let it remain. He called that notion akin to a city with stellar trash collection telling its denizens to go ahead and litter, since the garbage wouldn’t be around long.

It’s certainly understandable that Wikipedians would want to limit the rubbish they have to sweep away, given that they spend a fair amount of time fighting PR’s more nefarious cousin: use of the site to denigrate rivals. Last year, for example, Wikipedia temporarily blocked access from some computers assigned to Congress after a series of partisan pranks. In one, the entry on Sen. Robert Byrd was altered to give his age as 180 rather than 88.

Still, Wales said he realizes the payments issue has some gray areas. Participants on the Reward Board, he said, have to be sensitive about avoiding conflicts of interest.

"It’s all tricky, you know," he said.

The founders of one new information site, Helium.com, argue that Wales has it all wrong. As they see it, prohibiting payments is bad for Wikipedia - and an opportunity for them.

Helium.com lets anyone write an article on a topic. But unlike at Wikipedia, one contributor doesn’t overwrite another. Instead the community votes on which entries are more valuable. As a result, multiple articles on a subject appear together, with top-rated ones listed higher.

Authors are encouraged to write on something they know about, of course, but they are given an extra incentive: a cut of Helium’s ad sales.

Andrew Ressler, a Helium vice president, argues that Wikipedia’s ban on perceived conflicts of interest shuts out lots of people with "valuable insights and knowledge," and tends to leave the site to a small clan of diehards.

"Everybody is getting rewarded somehow," Ressler said. "Whether it’s intangible or tangible, what’s the difference?"

## EBay Announces Aggressive Buyback

EBay Inc. is following its 24 percent jump in fourth-quarter profit with an ambitious stock buyback that Wall Street interpreted as a measure of executives’ bullishness for future growth.

EBay shares soared $2.45, or 8.17 percent, to close at $32.45 on the Nasdaq Stock Market.

The San Jose-based e-commerce powerhouse announced Wednesday it would repurchase up to $2 billion of common stock within the next two years. Stock buybacks are considered a quick way to pump up a flagging stock price - if companies have plenty of cash and are confident about future earnings growth.

This is the second major repurchase program at eBay in the past year. The company repurchased 31 million shares for about $1 billion last quarter.

The solid earnings report and buyback come almost exactly two years after eBay stock slipped precipitously on concerns about whether the company could withstand competition from other e-commerce leaders, particularly Google Inc.

Analysts said the stock may now be a value relative to many of its rivals. "This is a stock that since January of 2005 has done nothing but fall down the stairs of Wall Street with a face plant on each step down," said David M. Garrity, director of research for Dinosaur Securities LLC. "Now that they appear to have hit bottom, there's clearly an opportunity here for management to restore their relationship with the investment community, and certainly this enhanced buyback program is an important step in the right direction."

Thanks to scorching holiday sales - particularly in the United States, United Kingdom and Germany - eBay reported Wednesday it earned $349 million, or 25 cents per share, for the three months ended Dec. 31. It earned $279 million, or 20 cents per share in the year-ago period.

Fourth-quarter revenue totaled $1.72 billion, up 29 percent from $1.33 billion in the year-ago period.

Excluding charges unrelated to ongoing operations, eBay earned $431 million, or 31 cents per share, up nearly 27 percent from the same quarter last year, when the company earned $340 million, or 24 cents per share.

On that basis, which does not comply with generally accepted accounting principles, eBay was expected to earn $402 million, or 28 cents per share, on sales of $1.67 billion, according to analysts polled by Thomson Financial. During the holiday quarter, more than 81 million active eBay users exchanged $14.4 billion in goods, ranging from pricey real estate and computer servers to Pez dispensers and clothing. The hottest sellers last quarter were automobiles and consumer electronics, in particular the Nintendo Wii and Sony PlayStation 3 gaming consoles.

President and Chief Executive Meg Whitman said the company raised first-quarter 2007 sales guidance to a range of $1.67 billion to $1.72 billion. Excluding special items, eBay expects earnings per share to be in the range of 28 cents to 30 cents per share.

Analysts said the strong quarterly results, buyback and increased guidance were the strongest signals yet that eBay could be poised for an upswing.

"I thought they were in a bit of trouble but it looks like they pulled it out. Meg did the hard spade work and pulled it all back together again," said Roger L. Kay, founder and president of research firm Endpoint Technologies. "I'd say eBay has bought itself at least a couple of years here in which they can think about how the enemies are sneaking around the back wall while they're minding the business."

In 2006, eBay earned $1.13 billion, or 79 cents per share, up 4 percent from $1.08 billion, or 78 cents per share, in 2005. Excluding stock-based compensation costs and other expenses, eBay in 2006 earned $1.49 billion, or $1.05 per share, up nearly 24 percent from $1.2 billion, or 86 cents per share, a year earlier.

Annual revenue was $5.97 billion, up 31 percent from $4.55 billion in 2005. That's higher than the $5.96 billion from the most optimistic analysts polled by Thomson Financial. Overall, analysts expected eBay to earn $1.46 billion, or $1.02 per share, on sales of $5.91 billion.

Despite the rosy quarter, fraud is mounting, and executives say combatting scams has become the top priority for 2007. An internal survey showed scammers may be denting eBay's reputation, and earlier this month, eBay's

largest 250 sellers expressed concern during closed-door meetings with executives about the growing number of scams.

Less than one-hundredth of one percent of the listings on eBay are fraudulent. But even by that measure, as many as 61,000 auctions may have been phony last quarter, when more than 610.2 million items were listed.

EBay began a program last year to safeguard members' identities by concealing their user names on expensive listings. That measure could make it harder for con artists to contact losing bidders and goad them into "second chance offers," where customers wire cash to scammers' accounts.

Executives are working with international trade groups and the FBI to combat cyber criminals from organized syndicates. Engineers are trying to reduce counterfeit items and "phishing" scams, where con artists send e-mails nearly identical to official eBay announcements - but redirect them to a site where passwords and financial data are mined.

"I got a very persuasive e-mail about my Bank of America account just last night, and if I wasn't in this industry I'm not sure I could have figure out it wasn't from Bank of America," Whitman said. "Trust and security must be part of our core competency, and we've got to stay a step ahead - more than a step ahead."

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